

Message Text

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PAGE 01 BANGKO 01279 231343Z

43

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 1279

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PGOV, PINS, TH

SUBJ: KRIS SIVARA ON THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION

1. THE DCM HELD A DINNER FOR RTA COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF GENERAL KRIS SIVARA JANUARY 22. THE AMBASSADOR AND THE POLITICAL COUNSELOR WERE THE ONLY OTHER PERSONS PRESENT. KRIS DISCUSSED THE PRIME MINISTER'S JANUARY 20 TRIP TO CHIANG MAI TO SEE THE KING, POSSIBLE PRIME MINISTERIAL CANDIDATES, PRASERT RUCHIRAWONGSE, STUDENTS, AND RTA MORALE.

2. KRIS SAID THAT THE KING HAD GIVEN SANYA A PEP TALK ABOUT STRENGTHENING SANYA'S LEADERSHIP IN THE GOVERNMENT, AND FURTHER ADVISED HIM TO CONSULT IN ADVANCE WITH KUKRIT PRAMOJ SO THAT THE NATIONAL LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY WOULD PASS BILLS THAT THE GOVERNMENT PROPOSES. KRIS SINGLED OUT KUKRIT AS THE MOST LIKELY PRIME MINISTERIAL SUCCESSOR TO SANYA AND INDICATED HE WOULD NOT BE UNHAPPY WITH THIS CHOICE. HE MENTIONED FOUR OTHER POSSIBILITIES: PUEY UNGPHAKORN, TO WHOM HE ASCRIBED MINIMAL POSSIBILITIES BECAUSE OF THE KING'S ATTITUDE TOWARD HIM; SENI PRAMOJ, WHOSE CHANCES WERE LOW *ECAUSE HIS PARTY HAD ONE SUCH A BAD JOB IN TRYING TO RUN THE BANGKOK MUNICIPALITY; AND TWO NORTHEAST POLITICIANS--THEP CHOTINUCHIT AND FONG SITTHITHAM.

3. QUERIED ABOUT THE POLITICAL AMBITIONS OF RETIRED POLICE GENERAL PRASERT RUCHIRAWONGSE, KRIS SAID THAT HE HAD RECENTLY

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 BANGKO 01279 231343Z

TOLD PRASERT NOT TO FORM A POLITICAL PARTY. KRIS BELIEVED THAT

PRASERT WOULD NOT DO SO. KRIS SAID THAT PRASERT HAD FORMERLY SUPPORTED RADICAL POLITICIANS LIKE KHAISAENG SUKSAI IN THE 1969-71 LEGISLATURE IN ORDER TO HAVE A POLITICAL BASE AT A TIME WHEN THANOM AND PRAPHAT WERE SQUEEZING HIM OUT OF POWER.

4. KRIS CHARACTERIZED THREE STUDENT LEADERS--SOMBAT THAMRONG-THANYAWONGSE, THIRAYUTH BOONMEE, AND SAEKSAN PRASERTHUL--IN RELATION TO THEIR ATTITUDE TO THE MONARCHY. HE SAID THAT SOMBAT, WITH HIS NATIONAL STUDENT CENTER OF THAILAND, WAS A GOOD FORCE AND BEHIND THE KING. HE CLAIMED THAT THIRAYUTH WAS WAVERING IN BETWEEN. HE CHARACTERIZED SAEKSAN AS ANTI-MONARCHICAL AND DANGEROUS.

5. KRIS SAID THAT RTA MORALE HAD FALLEN AT THE TIME OF THE MID-OCTOBER EVENTS, BUT THAT IT WAS NOW BACK UP. THE RTA WAS CONDUCTING AN INFORMATION PROGRAM ON DEMOCRACY AMONG THE SOLDIERS. HE ACKNOWLEDGED THERE WERE HOTHEADS IN THE ARMY, BUT HE HAD BEEN TELLING THEM TO KEEP COOL.

6. IN RESPONSE TO THE DCM'S QUESTION, KRIS SAID THAT HE HIMSELF MIGHT ENTER POLITICS AFTER HE RETIRES IN OCTOBER 1975. KRIS CONCLUDED BY SAYING THAT HE WAS SPEAKING FRANKLY TO US BECAUSE HE TRUSTED US. HE LOOKED FORWARD TO HAVING SUCH MEETINGS AT REGULAR INTERVALS.

7. COMMENT: ALTHOUGH THEP CHOTINUCHIT AND FONG SITTHITHAM HAVE STRONG LOCAL FOLLOWINGS IN KHON KAEN AND UBON PROVINCES RESPECTIVELY, NEITHER STRIKES US AS HAVING THE REGION-WIDE, AND PARTICULARLY THE NATION-WIDE, POPULARITY THAT WOULD RESULT IN THEIR BEING APPOINTED OR ELECTED AS PRIME MINISTER. SAEKSAN MADE SOME COMMENTS CRITICAL OF THE MONARCHY DURING THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT IN MID-OCTOBER AT THE HEIGHT OF THE STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS HE WAS VAINLY TRYING TO CONTROL, BUT THE KING GRANTED HIM AN HOUR-LONG AUDIENCE OCTOBER 22, AND WE HAVE NO INFORMATION THAT SAEKSAN IS PLOTTING THE KING'S OVERTHROW.

8. THE MOST IMPORTANT THEME TO EMERGE IS KRIS' GREAT RESPECT FOR THE KING. THIS SESSION WITH KRIS STRENGTHENED OUR EARLIER IMPRESSION THAT HE IS FULLY BEHIND THE KING, AND IS LIKELY TO BRING THE MILITARY INTO POLITICAL PLAY ONL* ON THE KING'S

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PAGE 03 BANGKO 0 279 231343Z

AUTHORIZATION AND UNDER HIS DIRECTION.

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